United Nations E/CN.6/2018/NGO/37/Rev.1

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 February 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-second session
12–23 March 2018
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, The Mountain Institute, Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands Development and Commerce, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-02623 (E) 230218

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Statement

This statement demonstrates best practices in engaging students, in particular non-traditional ones, in hands-on involvement to implement the Sustainable Development Goals addressing gender inequality, principally in impoverished mountain regions of the world.

Across mountain communities, women are frequently among the world's poorest and must be at the centre of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Being engaged in traditional roles as mothers and family caregivers, women are disproportionately affected by the challenges of mountain life. Limited access to education, information and credit further deepens their marginalization.

About 39 percent of the mountain population in developing countries, or 329 million people, is estimated to be vulnerable to food insecurity, according to a recent study of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in collaboration with the Mountain Partnership Secretariat. When only rural areas are considered, nearly half the population are at risk, particularly women. During the period 2000–2012, despite food insecurity decreasing at the global level, it increased in mountain areas. The study revealed a 30 percent increase in the number of mountain people, including women and children, vulnerable to food insecurity from 2000 to 2012, while the mountain population increased by only 16 percent.

We would like to highlight the importance of addressing the needs of communities and families in mountain regions, where women and children continue to be left behind and are at extreme risk of neglect in the global agenda.

As representatives of the mountain people around the world, we must emphasize the urgent need to reach the most remote, marginalized communities, especially those at higher elevations, who are left almost on their own to deal with emerging new threats such as climate change and others. On their behalf, we must address poverty and hunger eradication; greater gender equality; decent work opportunities and economic growth; industry and infrastructure; and sustainable communities.

As one of the ways to raise awareness about the need for sustainable development for mountain communities, families and women, the Mountain Partnership focuses efforts in mobilizing grassroots activists, youth and students in developed and in developing nations. In North America, in particular, the Mountain Partnership has encouraged the faculty and students of one of its members, Utah Valley University, to be an active contributor to sustainable development of mountain communities, families and women in the developing world.

Utah Valley University is the largest university in mountainous Utah, a state with one of the most successful models of sustainable development in the United States. As its major contribution to sustainable mountain development advocacy globally, the university established, together with its partner the Kyrgyz National Center for Development of Mountain Regions, the international Women of the Mountains conference as a major grassroots-level forum in North America to promote the gender and sustainable mountain development agendas of the United Nations.

While the Commission on the Status of Women engages youth in promoting the gender agenda, the Utah Valley University model also engages non-traditional students, students who are usually older than 25 years. Non-traditional students are defined as the ones who may have delayed enrolment into postsecondary education; attended university part-time and work full time; are financially independent for financial aid purposes; have dependents other than a spouse; are single parents; or do not have a high school diploma. These students represent more than 30% of college students in the United States and many are women. However, most have diverse

professional skills and experiences which can benefit the world, e.g., especially in gender-related issues.

The first Women of the Mountains conference hosted by the university in 2007 served as an academic forum to both raise awareness and advocate eliminating gender inequality, as well as address sustainability challenges in mountainous areas in North America and overseas. In follow-on conferences, students undertook service learning initiatives under the umbrella of the Mountain Partnership where they played major roles in organizing and hosting through the engaged learning model. Under that model students gained professional skills and experiences by addressing real-world problems of mountain women advocacy at local, regional and United Nations levels with an instructor as a mentor.

The fourth international women of the mountains conference was hosted in Utah, October 7–9, 2015 solely through the efforts of the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University. Members of the coalition, the majority of whom are non-traditional students, raised funds to host the event and brought diplomats, experts and women from mountain nations worldwide to Utah. The goal was to engage students in creating awareness and seeking solutions compatible with gender-related goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development documents.

The United Nations Secretary-Generals'' Report on sustainable mountain development A/71/256, from 29 July, 2016 highlighted the UVU model of student engagement in advocacy of gender and sustainable mountain development agendas of the United Nations. It emphasized the important role which students play not only in hosting the conference but also in adopting the final document of the conference with recommendations concerning the implementations of sustainable development goals and mountain targets in particular. The document recommended that goal #5 needs to have strong support for improving women's rights and welfare, including women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; that target #6.6 requires stressing the role that women play in the protection of the environment and water sources; and the implementation of target #15.1 takes into account the critical role women play as promoters of innovation, development and cooperation for the common good.

The model allowed students, non-traditional ones in particular, to gain professional skills and experiences through the advocacy of the mountain and rural women causes on local and global levels. They did it by not only hosting the international Women of the Mountains Conferences and conducted research of gender norms, sexuality, and religion in Utah, but also by successfully teaching women business management in Zambia; working with students in Indonesia on tsunami-preparedness community education projects; conducting researches such as water quality in Senegal, the impact of mining and oil pipelines on indigenous people in Ecuador and globalization impact to Tarahumara Mexican women.

This experience demonstrates that students of all ages can play an essential role in the implementation of the 2030 development agenda of the United Nations, and gender issues in particular. It can be used by other universities in rural and mountain states of North America and elsewhere to provide similar benefits to their students, and at the same time contribute to advocating the post-2030 Development agenda and sustainable development goal #5 on global gender issues, in particular.

This statement is supported by:

The Mountain Institute, a NGO in special consultative status with ECOSOC.

The Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with ECOSOC;

The Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands & Development & Commerce, an NGO in special consultative status with ECOSOC.